

SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

Monday 8th August, 2024

MEETING OF SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillors Duffy (Chairperson);
Councillors Abernethy and McLaughlin

External Members: Ms. B. Arthurs, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Mr. J. Donnelly, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Ms. L. Euler, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
Mr. L. Gunn, Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
Ms. C. Guinness, Belfast Chamber;
Mr. M. McBride, Education Authority;
Ms. A. Tohill, Good Relations, TEO;
Ms. A. Roberts, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Mr. G. Walker, Community and Voluntary Sector; and
Ms. A. M. White, British Red Cross.

In attendance: Ms. D. McKinney, PEACE Programme Manager;
Mr. D. Robinson, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Alderman Copeland and Councillor Smyth and also from Mr. P. Anderson, Ms. J. Irwin, Dr. W. Naeem and Superintendent Henry.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th June, 2024, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

Ms. A. Tohill, TEO, declared an interest in PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan Update (item 5) as the TEO was involved in the assessment process for the BCC PEACEPLUS application under IA1.1 and she left the meeting at this stage in proceedings.

Verbal Update on Membership

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer advised that Ms. Laura Euler had replaced Ms. Caroline McMenamin as the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust representative and welcomed her to her first meeting of the Partnership.

He further advised the Members that officers had corresponded with the Bishop of Down and Connor Diocese seeking a nomination for the Faith representative for the Partnership for the incoming year. He stated that he hoped to be in a position to provide an update at the September meeting of the Partnership.

The Chairperson also welcomed Ms. C. Guinness, Belfast Chamber, to her first meeting.

Noted.

Verbal - Slot Cross-Departmental Working Group Race Hate Crime

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer advised the Members that the Executive Office had been chairing a Cross-Departmental Working Group (CDWG) in partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) in response to the recent escalation in racist hate incidents and crime in our communities. He detailed that the key objective of the CDWG was to foster open dialogue, share perspectives and to collaboratively explore actionable strategies to promote understanding and community cohesion.

He reported that, at the last meeting of the CDWG in April, it had been agreed to explore how best to link with Elected Members about the rise in race hate incidents and messaging to take a stance against such behaviours.

He advised that, upon discussion, officers had felt that it might be useful to invite members of the CDWG working group to the September meeting of the Partnership for a 20-minute slot to enable them to present on the role of the CSWG and to enable discussion with the SCP Members.

Following discussion in relation to the recent disturbances in the city, which it was agreed would be discussed in more detailed at the end of the meeting, the NIHE and TEO undertook to also provide an update on the Building Relationships in the Community Programme (BRIC) at the next meeting.

The Partnership agreed to invite representatives of the CDWG to the September meeting and to receive and update on the BRIC Programme.

Good Relations - Quarter 1 Report and LoO Update

The Partnership considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update the Shared City Partnership on the delivery of the Council’s Good Relations Action Plan during Quarter 1 which covers the period April – June 2024.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That Members recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that they note the contents of the report,

including the allocation of £158,851 in grants through the Good Relations Small Grant Scheme.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Members will be aware that the Council receives 75% of funding from The Executive Office (TEO) for the delivery of its annual Good Relations Action Plan.

3.2 The current Action Plan was agreed at the Partnership in February 2024 and subsequently submitted to TEO. The total value of the Action Plan at that stage was £758,584.36. The requested 75% TEO contribution towards this was £568,938.27.

3.3 Council received a letter of offer from TEO on July 22nd, detailing that its allocation to this years' Action Plan would be £369,809.69. This is 35% less than what the Council had bid for (which was the same amount as was bid for in 2022/23). While this is slightly more than the £301,537.28 allocated for 2023/24, it has meant that the Action Plan has had to be once again cut back.

3.4 As a result of this shortfall, the total value of the Action Plan is £493,079.59. Within this, the 75% contribution from TEO consists of £369,809.69, with the remaining 25%, or £123,269.90 being contributed by the Council. Of this overall total, £365,000 is allocated towards programmes.

3.5 It should also be noted that the Council contributes more to Good Relations work than merely its 25% match funding to the Action Plan. The overall Council contribution to Good Relations in 2023/24 was £413,320.10 and this figure will be similar for 2024/25

3.6 The following is a summary progress update on activity and allocations during Q1:

Code	Project Summary	Budget	Progress in Quarter 1	Total allocated
BCC1	Good Relations Small Grants Programme.	£155,000	43 projects awarded funding for Good Relations projects. See appendix 2.	£158,851
BCC2	St Patrick's Day Civic Events programme	£20,000	No activity in Quarter 1.	£0

BCC3	Positive Cultural Expression Programme	£20,000	Beacon Programme ongoing.	£0
BCC4	Civic Engagement and Learning Programme	£20,000	Day of Reflection delivered Refugee Week events delivered	£7,563.48
BCC5	Minority Ethnic Equality and Inclusion Programme	£60,000 (original: £80,000)	April meeting of migrant forum took place. 2 projects allocated support	£15,300
BCC6	Embedding Good Relations Programme	£0 (original: £30,000)	This programme will not proceed as a result of budget shortfall	£0
BCC7	Interface Engagement and tackling sectarianism and racism	£60,000 (original: £80,000)	Engagement with groups to develop proposals.	£0
BCC8	Shared Education Schools Programme	£20,000 (original: £30,000)	Programme planning for delivery ongoing.	£0
BCC 9	Strategic Connections and Support Programme	£10,000 (original: £60,000)	No activity in Q1	£0
	TOTAL	£365,000 (Original: £495,000)		£181,714.48

3.7 Financial and Resource Implications

All costs within the District Council's Good Relations Action Plan are covered within existing agreed budgets.

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

All activity within the District Council's Good Relations Action Plan seek to improve Good Relations between people from different political, religious, and racial backgrounds.”

A Member expressed disappointment in the reduced funding allocation, which had resulted in the proposed Good Relations Action Plan having to be streamlined and stressed the need for flexibility regarding activity. In response to a query, the Acting Senior Good Relations Officer confirmed that, if necessary, funding could be reprofiled throughout the year to deal with emerging issues.

A further Member stressed the need for contingency funding, citing recent events as an example.

The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it note the contents of the report, including the allocation of £158,851 in grants through the Good Relations Small Grant Scheme.

Peace Plus Belfast City Council Local Action Plan Update

The PEACE Programme Manager advised that, as previously reported, approval of the PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan had been due to conclude, with approval by the SEUPB steering committee expected on 19th June 2024. She reported that there had, however, been delays in the approval process. The initial delay had been subject to ministerial approval and agreement by the Department of Finance. These approvals had subsequently been secured, and the SEUPB Steering Committee approval was now to be progressed. She reported that it was anticipated that a Steering Committee meeting would be held mid-August.

The Members were asked to note that the delays would have a slight impact on the delivery timeframe for the Action Plan. The PEACEPLUS Programme Board had recommended that mobilisation of the Action Plan be progressed as close to the original timeframe as possible, which might require condensed delivery to achieve targets by 1-2 months, with contract awards up to December 2027. The indicative timeframe (which had been circulated with the agenda) was subject to Letter of Offer and Terms and Conditions of funding which would be issued by SEUPB once approval had been confirmed.

In terms of the recruitment of the PEACEPLUS Team, she reported that this was progressing with the Finance and Claims Officer and three Project Managers now having taken up their respective positions. The Monitoring and Data Analyst would be in post by mid-August 2024. Re-advertisement was currently progressing for the Project Officer and Project Support Assistant posts.

The Members were advised that each Project Manager was responsible for the implementation, delivery and management of projects on a cross disciplinary approach across all three themes. An approach recommended in the PEACE IV Lessons Learnt. In addition, each Project Manager would be responsible for leading and co-ordinating the quarterly Thematic Steering Group meetings. The Members attention was drawn to the Project Portfolio Allocation which had been circulated with the agenda as an appendix.

The officer highlighted that feedback following the delivery of the Prepare to Procure Capacity Building Programme and Networking session had identified the need for an understanding regarding the role of lead contractors. Officers were currently liaising with Procurement Services to compile the content and schedule a further session early August on this element of further capacity building.

As previously advised, all expenditure associated with the PEACEPLUS LCAP would be eligible from the date of application submission, which was 14th December 2023. Therefore, all current expenditure was within the existing budget which would be claimed retrospectively from the SEUPB. As the assessment process was ongoing, advice on the drawdown of the £30K advance from the SEUPB would be progressed by the Programme Manager once the assessment process had been concluded.

Following a query, the PEACE Programme Manager provided an indicative timeline of the larger projects that would commence via procurement next month, subject to receipt and confirmations of the Letter of Offer and Terms and Conditions of funding from the SEUPB.

The Partnership agreed to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Any Other Business

The Members referred to the recent violent destruction and racist intimidation that had occurred across the city against people from ethnic minorities living in Belfast, following the recent stabbing of three young children in Southport. Discussion ensued regarding specific incidences that had occurred within the Members respective communities and against businesses which had been targeted and consideration was given to ways in which the Council could provide tangible assistance to help.

The PEACE Programme Manager referred to an e-mail that had been received from Shared City Partnership Member (SCP), Dr. Wasif Naeem, advising that he had hoped to attend today's meeting but unfortunately given the ongoing situation he was unavailable and asking the SCP to consider releasing a statement condemning the violence. She further advised that she had spoken with him immediately prior to the meeting to offer the Council's support.

The Members unanimously condemned the activities of the far-right agitators and expressed their solidarity with those in our ethnic minorities cross the city. Whilst there was unanimous support for the SCP issuing a statement, it was noted that due to the SCP being a Working Group any such statement could not be released until the minutes had been ratified by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and subsequently the Council, which would be several weeks down the line.

The Chairperson advised the Members that a special meeting of the Council had been called and was being held at 6.00 p.m. this evening and that it was likely that the Council would be releasing a statement condemning the violence.

The Members also discussed the fact that MEARS had declined the Partnership's previous request to attend a meeting to address queries and, considering recent events, asked that they again be asked to attend a future meeting. At the request of a Member it was also agreed that an update be sought from them in respect of what security and support had been offered to asylum seekers in hotels and dispersal accommodation following the violent weekend activities (re: AASC contract-welfare and security of asylum seekers).

Following discussion, given the serious and ongoing nature of recent events, it was agreed that a SCP Workshop would be convened as soon as possible to further consider what practical and proactive steps the SCP could take to assist with rebuilding damaged relationships and businesses throughout the city.

Chairperson